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SOCIAL VALUES AND PATTERNS OF LIVING

I. CUSTOMS AND CHARACTERISTIC WAYS OF LIFE

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The Chinese imperial system was strikingly successful in fostering common basic attitudes among the peoples which it absorbed within its ever-widening sphere, but local and regional sub-cultures, brought into the imperial order at different times throughout more than two millenia, did not lose all their characteristic traits. In the Central-South Region, for example, the oldest "Chinese" area was Honan, a land-locked agricultural region. When, centuries later, the coastal areas of Kwangtung were absorbed by imperial China, the terrain and climate, the dependence on the seas and rivers for livelihood, meant that a way of life, a culture markedly different from any in North China, persisted and developed. A rough analogy may be drawn with Western Europe. Many basic attitudes and values are common to "Christian Europe" from Sicility to the Arctic, yet history and geography have made this area diverse in customs and ways of life. The diversity is less in the 1,000-mile long arc of Central-South China, partly because its cultures were never set off from one another by the nation-state boundaries that divide modern Europe.

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There are other factors which give to most of the area we are now considering important uniformities in culture. The expansion of "Chinese culture" from Honan into the whole of south China was essentially the steady outward push of an efficient agricultural technique which displaced the more primitive aboriginal food-gatherers and primitive slash-burn agri-

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culturists, absorbed most of these people into its operation, and drove the remnants higher and higher into the hills. The characteristically Chinese agriculture was intensive, that is, it uses large quantities of human labor in irrigating, fertilizing, and cultivating land for maximum yields. Its units of socio-economic organization is the village, composed of those families which cultivate the land within easy walking distance of its center. It was in the villages of rural China, spread over a vast area to exploit the land through a common technology, that the characteristic way of life developed. It is his family's village which is "home" to Chinese of all classes, no matter how far he may wander or how Westernized his life may have become. There are ties with his own family's past, symbolized by the ancestral temple and the family or clan burial ground. There are the other families with which his own has built an enduring network of reciprocal favors and obligations. It is in the farming villages that Communist Party workers now seek to bring about fundamental changes in the way of life and to break up the old complex of family and local loyalties.

What are the common patterns of village life from the plains of Honan to the delta of the Pearl River? We shall sketch these before discussing variations represented by urban life.

A. Village Life

First of all, life in the farming village is meager. In Honan in 1932 there was about one-half an acre of cultivated land per person; in the richer, semi-tropical province of Kwangtung there was one-fifth of an

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II. BASIC ATTITUDES

One of the principal reasons for the stability and long life of the old order in China was its social homogeneity. The imperial government fostered uniformity of attitudes and values, and Chinese statemen believed this to be a more binding, durable, and cheaper cement for the imperial order than governmental coercion. Old China was primarily a way of life, a system of values and attitudes, and on this premise the state was organized. A foreigner who wished to become "naturalized" had only to show that he accepted Chinese attitudes and values; this he did by adopting Chinese dress and speech and patterns of behavior. 181

This characteristic of the old order is one of the reasons why we find no important regional variations in basic attitudes. The other reason is that the Communist government is as determined, in enforcing a uniformity of values and attitudes, and far more resourceful, than was the imperial government of the past. 181 668

There are, however, certain local variations in temperament and ethos which affect, to a minor degree, the basic attitudes and values. A few of these will be noted. For the variant attitudes and values of ethnic and religious minorities, see the chapters on Ethnic Groups and Religion.

There have been profound changes in basic attitudes over the last century and particularly during the last five years. Change has been brought about by 181 668 178

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two factors. The first is the disintegration of the old social and political order resulting from its failure to adapt itself to the problems and pressures of the modern world. Consequently, people became critical of the older attitudes and, in increasing numbers, adopted newer "modern" attitudes and values which were considered better suited to a modern China. The second is the power of the Communist state which, in the last five years, has been used to inculcate a new and uniform set of values and attitudes.

These two factors are closely inter-related. Thus the Communists have been making a systematic use of individual and group-dissatisfaction with the old order to inspire and promote the acceptance of the new attitudes and values; the latter's appeal has been particularly strong with youth -- especially adolescents -- and with women who have been taught to regard the old social order as tyrannical and oppressive. The following will illustrate this last point:

> Co-operative agriculture has organization,
> and women are not left out.
> In the old society we were badly mistreated,
> but the new society teaches friendship
> and love.[1]

In addition to capitalizing on discontent, the Communists have been making a peculiar use of traditional attitudes and values. Certain values from the old order still have a strong emotional appeal for the Chinese people. And the Communists seek to make the new order more acceptable by associating some of its elements with selected elements from

1. Fu-nu San-tzu Ching [Three-character Classic for Women], Hsin-hua Publishing House, 1950, p 21. Three-character rhymed verses were widely used in traditional China for indoctrination of the young.

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the traditional culture. For example, they insist that as a guiding principle of personal behavior the idea of "struggle" (tou-cheng) must replace that of "harmony" (ho).[2] People are taught to struggle for self-perfection and to engage in class struggle, in the struggle for a new China, and in the struggle against deviation even when this involves attacking their friends. This is utterly contrary to the old ideal of harmony in personal relations, an ideal that meant in practice a comfortable adjustment to one's natural and human environments. Yet in urging all to struggle, the Communists insist that the ultimate goal of all struggle is the Ta-t'ung Ching-yü -- the traditional utopian ideal of a harmonious, friction-less social order.[3]

In discussing certain attitudes and values we should bear in mind that the power of the old and the appeal of the new vary not according to regions but according to social groups. It was among the population of modern cities like Shanghai that the old values were first challenged by the pressures of modern problems, but among the peasantry and rural gentry, despite many discontents and tensions, the old ways still prevailed.[4] Intellectuals and members of the new industrial and commercial groups were the first to discard traditional attitudes and adopt Western values; among other groups this process was slower. These variations affect Communist tactics to the extent that different kinds of persuasion are used with different groups. But the final goal is adoption of the attitudes and values decreed by the Communist leadership.

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2. Cf. Arthur F. Wright, "Struggle vs. Harmony: Symbols of Competing Values in Modern China," World Politics, Vol. VI (Oct. 1953) pp. 31-44.

3. Mao Tse-tung, On People's Democratic Dictatorship 3d. ed., Peking, Foreign Languages Press,

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